



Stone Age

Jaime Jenkins

By Justine Olsen

Stone Age, 2020, Jhana Millers Gallery, installation view, featuring: wall-mounted grouping *Brown Vine*, *Harvest Plait*, and *Bell on a Branch* with the floor based object *Pillar with Oval cut out*.

In a year when the force of nature governed our lives, Jaime Jenkins' exhibition *Stone Age* enables audiences to dream and explore an imagined interior, through the ancient medium of stoneware. The exhibition is Jenkins' first solo show with Jhana Millers Gallery, having opened in October of 2020. It is a gallery which supports young and emerging artists.

Stone Age is an object based exhibition within which Jenkins explores ideas about the natural environment, design, architecture and craft. The interior is the conceptual framework for this project revealing her desire to consider how traditional ideas of craft and design can be rewritten into the interior, when conventional expectations and functions are removed – can an architectural element be fashioned into a small piece of furniture? All objects are made through hand-pinching, coiling or slab techniques; Jenkins' skill in materiality abounds. Her fluid style shows too her interest in polarities which reveal her zest for texture, colour and form. Together and independently the objects beguile, ensuring a rewarding experience for the viewer.

Jenkins' spatial awareness ensures the gallery is used to its full potential, as she uses the floor and wall surfaces to build unexpected juxtapositions and groupings. Such an example is the grouping *Brown Vine*, *Harvest Plait*, and *Bell on a Branch*, with the floor based object *Pillar with Oval cut out*. Together they build ideas around nature, nourishment, sound and rest.

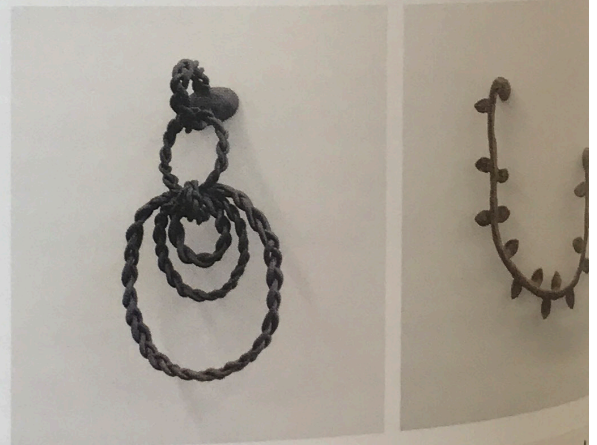
Jenkins is a young ceramic artist (born 1992) whose extensive experience has enabled her to explore ideas and techniques in clay, both within New Zealand and internationally. Studying under artist Laurie Steer for an Advanced Diploma of Visual arts in ceramics from Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, Bay of Plenty, she gained experience in functional and non-functional ceramics. Residencies at Driving Creek Pottery, Coromandel, and working as an assistant to artist Francis Upritchard in London enabled her to further build her practice.

Within *Stone Age*, particular themes arise, including Jenkins' interest in architecture and design. These works are made using the slab technique, reflecting construction methods of building. Crisp edges and solid forms evoke architectural elements, although Jenkins goes further as she builds on structural absence. In *Small Arch*, for example, reference to structural/architectural walls disappear as she alludes to furniture design and living while the object rests on the gallery floor.

In *Diamond Tiles* Jenkins creates an architectural screen using small slab tiles joined by brass rings. Jenkins emphasises the design quality of this work through repetition, geometry and ornamentation. Weight is explored through her interest in polarity - the lightness of the pierced decoration and the darkness of the glazed tiles, alleviated by the subtle changes in shading.

Below left: *Diamond Tiles*

Below right (clockwise from top left): *Harvest Plait*, *Brown Vine*,
Cobalt Bell Chain





Above: *Three Ledges and Willow Basket*

Right (from top): *Small Arch, Beaded Ring*

Below right (from top): *Stone Shelf, Hanging Lace*

Jenkins embraces the organic nature of coiled and pinch techniques, reinforcing her interest in craft traditions. *Woven Shelf*, *Wall Basket* and *Hanging Lace* are all wall hung, and reflect traditional practices of weaving, basketry and lace making. However, Jenkins removes the association of traditional materials and colour as she builds her objects in clay. Conceptual juxtapositions abound – *Cobalt Bell Chain* introduces the ancient jewellery technique alongside the musical instrument of the bell, contrasting sound with silence, ornamentation with functionality, perfection with imperfection.

While clay underpins all the objects in the exhibition, Jenkins draws on the natural environment to bring the wider world into the room. Form, structure and texture play significant roles. *Red Vine* introduces nature as both decoration and structure, while *Stone Shelf* works directly with her love of place. The textural shelf was made using pebbles and stones from the Waitawheta River in the Karangahake Gorge, an area near her home in Tauranga.

In the exhibition *Stone Age*, Jenkins' imaginings introduce a complex set of ideas. By questioning conventions in design and craft through exploring 'the interior', she has made a playful but significant contribution to ceramic art and installation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

